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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000715

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
S/CT FOR AMB DELL DAILEY
ALSO FOR A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [MCAP](#) [MARR](#) [EAIR](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: FORMER PM OMAR KARAMI: OLD DOG WITH NO
NEW TRICKS

REF: A. BEIRUT 713

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 714

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In a May 16 meeting, Former Lebanese Prime Minister and Syrian puppet Omar Karami regaled us with his knowledge of nothing. In his most polite and soft-spoken way, he played down the significance of the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP), while giving faint praise to the "resistance." Karami also told Charge that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)'s actions were appropriate to preserve the unity of the LAF.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge, accompanied by Defense Attache and PolOffs met with Former Prime Minister Omar Karami and his assistant Fadi Khaldoun Al Sharif at his home in Tripoli, north Lebanon on May 16.

I AM SMELLING SOMETHING
OUTSIDE OF THE COUNTRY

[1](#)3. (C) Karami said the current Lebanese conflict was "what we expected" because the Lebanese political system relies on power sharing. With the advent of elections that created majority and minority blocks, Karami told us that this has led to the present difficulties. "Our democracy cannot settle politics, except by sharing," said Karami. Furthering this deep division, according to Karami, is the wholly detrimental effects of UNSCR 1559 which have driven huge divisions between the Lebanese people.

[1](#)4. (C) Karami said that the current dysfunctional government "is a normal process because Lebanon cannot exist without sharing power." (Comment: It is hard to tell if Karami is speaking about the current government, or the ones he headed which collapsed. There may be some revisionist historical analysis being projected on the current political scene to make his previous failures appear less odious. End Comment.) In the end, said Karami, "I am smelling something going on outside the country." We wonder which kitchen is doing the cooking.

HIZBALLAH'S DEMANDS AT DOHA
NO CHANGES TO PREVIOUS ITEMS

15. (C) Karami told Charge that Hizballah would not have any demands at Doha. Rather, it would stick to its clear policies of 1) retaining their weapons, 2) no Lebanese entities will attack their status as "the resistance," and 3) a blocking third in the Cabinet. Karami was almost nonplused in his response saying, "these are not new demands."

SUNNI-SHIA SENSITIVITY
CANNOT BE IGNORED

16. (C) Karami told us that "no one can ignore the sensitivity of the Sunni-Shia" relationship at this time. While there are no Shia in the north, the events in Beirut will reverberate among the Sunnis from Tripoli in Karami's estimation. Karami clearly denounced violence saying, "violence will not take us anywhere, so I think Doha will succeed." However, if Doha fails, "I don't know what will happen," said Karami.

WHAT IS THE SSNP DOING?

17. (C) On several occasions, the subject of the SSNP and its role in recent events came to the fore of the discussion. On each occasion, Karami lightly dismissed them as a party that is "related to the Syrians, supports the 'resistance', supports the opposition, and is against the United States."